

Agricultural Resources Committee (ARC)

Minutes of December 11, 2008

12:00 – 2:00 PM

Whidbey Island Bank, Friday Harbor

ARC Members Present: Jane Burton Bell, Peter Corning, Neal Foley, Todd Goldsmith, Bruce Gregory, Eliza Habegger, Sara Jones, Jim Lawrence, Hawk Pingree, Tom Schultz, Jim Sesby, Madden Surbaugh, Mark Tompkins

ARC Members Absent: Ralph Hahn, Kji McIntyre

Friends Present: Christina Dahl-Sesby, Candace Jagel (WSU), Alayne Sundberg, Bill Watson (EDC), Diana Zapalac, David Zapalac

ARC Staff Present: Eliza Buck

MINUTES

Peter Corning moved to approve the November 24, 2008 minutes. Jim Sesby seconded. Motion unanimously approved.

OLD BUSINESS

Regulatory Issues

Christina Dahl-Sesby and Alayne Sundberg came to speak to the ARC in November about regulatory issues. Eliza Buck followed up by calling a number of agencies to see if they are hearing similar issues: Fred Berman of WSDA Small Farms Team and Mary Embelton of Cascade Harvest Coalition both have heard that regulations are negatively impacting small farms. They both suggested that a regional approach would be the most affective.

Christina and Alayne expressed frustration that WSDA inspectors are against raw milk production and it makes their interactions with the inspectors difficult. Alayne recently received results from a national wide goat dairy survey (USDA) and 30% of the surveys cited regulations as their number one block to marketing.

Members offered the following recommendations:

- test results from WSDA inspections should be available to farmers;
- egg handlers guidelines should not require single use wipes but allow alternative methods;
- form a regulatory subcommittee to address these issues;
- explore an Ombudsman or farmer complaint hearing board;
- invite state representatives (especially Kevin Ranker) into the discussion and give him possible solutions (small farm exemptions from large farm regulations);
- ask NABC to coordinate a regional approach;
- self-regulation – WSDA oversees safety protocol and farmer sends in documentation
- propose that WSDA and local health departments take an educational approach by providing farmers with assistance (working with rather than focusing on punitive measures).

There are two different scales of marketing – small production direct to consumer and large factory sold by second party to consumers. Both are subject to similar regulatory requirements.

Christina Dahl-Sesby told the committee that some local health inspectors, including the food handler license instructor, has publicly spread negative information about raw milk and local dairies.

Mark Tompkins said that the classes would be discontinued and changed to an online format. Mark has addressed the issue with the inspector. He recommended that the ARC invite WSDA Food Safety director, Claudia Coles, to come speak to the committee.

Neal Foley read a letter from the Our Lady of the Rock Monastery on Shaw Island about their dairy practices and that they have never had a report of any illness induced by their milk products. He has been drinking their raw milk for the last 18 years without incident.

Jane Burton-Bell motioned to invite Claudia Coles to come speak to the ARC. Hawk seconded the motion. Peter amended it to ask Mark Tompkins to do the initial contact. The motion was unanimously approved.

NEW BUSINESS

Bruce told the ARC about a proposal to move the ARC coordinator position to the Economic Development Council because it could apply for Point 09 Funds, which are strictly for economic development. This might give the ARC an opportunity to more easily apply for grants; however, it might also change our relationship to the County Council. Bruce and Bill Watson will explore further.

Jim Lawrence told the committee that Auditor said that the ARC needs to tell the Council specifically how the ARC makes an economic difference to its constituency.

ARC 2009 Work Plan

The ARC decided to go back to the subcommittee format. Below are the Subcommittee assignments:

Farmland Preservation – chair position vacant

Projects: farmland mapping, no net loss of farmland, land bank assistance, farmlink, Assessor's early warning

PeggyBill, Eliza Buck, Tim Clark, Candace Jagel, Eliza Habegger, Sara Jones, Jim Lawrence

Farmer Enrichment – Tom Schultz, Chair

Projects: ICL program, farm to school, agritourism, farmer-purveyor connection

Rich Anderson, Eliza Buck, Jane Burton-Bell, Kji McIntyre, Hawk Pingree

Regulations – Peter Corning, Chair,

Projects: scale appropriate regulations, AG Ombudsman, CAO, Water rights, Right to Farm

Neal Foley, Todd Goldsmith, Sara Jones, Jim Lawrence, Jim Sesby, Alayne Sundberg, Mark Tompkins, Diana Zapalac

The Regulations Subcommittee decided to meet on December 19, 2008 from 1- 3 PM.

NEXT MEETING

The December meeting will be held on Jan. 28, 2009 from 5 – 7 PM at Whidbey Island Bank.